THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE

EDMOND HOLMES

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THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE

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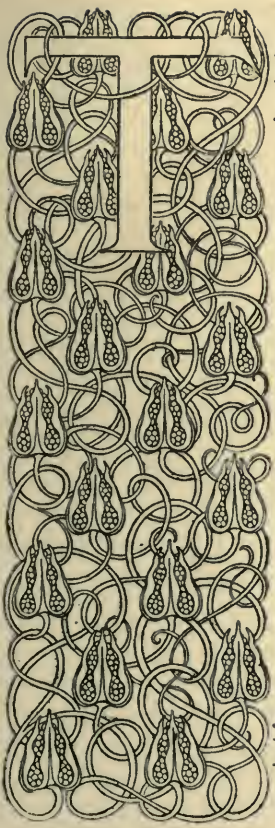

THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE BY EDMOND HOLMES

JOHN LANE: MDCCCCIII
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TO URANIA

Queen of my soul! Queen of my life profound!
Hast thou mapped out thy kingdom? Canst thou say
What walls of flame, what seas of darkness bound
The mystic realms that own thy sovran sway?
Or (for their name is legion) canst thou tell
What passions wild, what thoughts unnamed, unknown,
What dreams, what hopes in that far country dwell,
Thralls of thy will and lieges of thy throne?
'Twere vain to count them. Let them hear thy voice
And see thy banner shining like a star:
Swifter than lightning they will make their choice,
And muster in their hosts from near and far,—
Burning to march, obedient to thy call,
And win new worlds or round thy standard fall.

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TO PSYCHE

I

WHILE other women strive with wiles and arts
To win our love and make us own their sway,
Yet never pass the outworks of our hearts,
Who mock their pains or only yield in play;—
Thou, who art innocent of arts and wiles,
Whose eyes bewitch us in their own despite,
Who pourest forth the sunshine of thy smiles
Because thy soul is beautiful and bright,—
Who hast no thought, no care but just to be
Thine own sweet self, exhaling charm and grace,
Thine own pure self from thrall of self set free,
Whose truest image is thy soul-lit face;—
Thou art our queen! When all assaults have failed,
Our hearts to thee surrender unassailed.

II.

I LOVE thee, Dearest, for thine own dear sake,
Not for the sake of love ; for love to me
Came in thy guise, and bade my heart awake
From dreams of love's delight to love of thee.
Not for love's sake but for thy very own;—
Yet Love, immortal Love, is well content
That I should love thee for thyself alone,
Since thy sweet self is love's embodiment.
Not for love's sake I love thee, but for thine
I love my dream of love,—the vision fair
That lured my footsteps to Love's altar-shrine,
And taught my heart to kneel in hope and prayer;—
Till Love at last unveiled his hidden grace,
And gazing upward I beheld—thy face.

III

LOVE, that ever wooed art never won,—
While thou wast yet a dream, I knew thy light,
Streaming from Heaven, had kindled star and sun,
And that beyond thee all was death and night.
Now thou art near: my brow has felt thy kiss;
My bosom beats obedient to thy will;
Thy flame enfolds me:—yet a dread abyss,
A gulf of doom holds us asunder still.
And dreaming of thy face, which none may see,
With prayer and hope I sought life's only prize;
But now thy face, with its epipnany
Of more than beauty, blinds my dazzled eyes,—
And, far beyond the reach of hope or prayer,
Bids me pursue it with my heart's despair.

IV

LOVE'S arms enfold me, but his eyes are hid:
Mine turn to meet them when his fond embrace
Glows through my heart; but on each lifted lid
He prints a kiss,—and darkness veils his face.
O Love, divinest lover, on thy breast
I lie entranced: thy warm ambrosial breath
Fills me with yearning dreams that break my rest:—
I cry for light,—but all is dark as death.
What if, with prying eyes, with lamp aglow,
I dared to lift the curtain of Love's night,
Would not my hand, heart-shaken, tremble so,
Thrilled by a beauty so divinely bright,
That, fluttering down, one drop of liquid fire
Would scare Love hence, and quench my soul's desire?

V

I THINK that we were children long ago
In some far land beyond the gates of death,
Where souls, too innocent for bliss or woe,
Wait for renewal of their mortal breath.
I think we played together on the shore
Of some blue inlet of eternity,
And heard the waters rolling evermore,
And saw the mystic light on land and sea.
I think we roamed together, side by side,—
Heart linked to heart in childhood's guileless love—
Haunted by fears of Ocean waste and wide,
By gleams of glory from the worlds above,
By faint remembrances of days on earth,
By dim forebodings of our second birth.

VI

UR summons came: and o'er the darkling seas,
From the low shore-line of that shadowy land,
Our bark sped on before the fateful breeze
Towards the far lights of earth's predestined strand.
O lost and found! My life! My love! confess,
Ere yet the winds our canvas had unfurled,
What angel, stooping to a last caress,
Gave thee that potion to bewitch the world?
A cruel gift! With heedless lips athirst
I drank, and through my veins the poison stole:
And thence through life deep in my heart I nursed
Prophetic passion for thy kindred soul;—
Blind to my doom—for on earth's misty shore
Dies all remembrance of what passed before.

VII

WHILE yet my love was flowing, swift and wild,
A mountain torrent, child of mist and snow,—
While yet its flood was clear and undefiled,—
Fate dammed it back and bade it cease to flow:
But not the less, descending from their source,
(Storm-fed, cloud-haunted, in the heights above,)
Behind the barrier wall that blocked their course,
Gathered and rose the baffled waves of love;—
Gathered and deepened, till the hills were glassed
In a blue lake, far-winding, calm and wide,
Whose mining weight of waters cleft at last
A second outlet for love's prisoned tide:—
Now, born anew, love's torrent seaward flows,
Flung from its pent-up passion's deep repose.

VIII

ALAS! I can but love thee. This alone
Hath Fate permitted. I may never see
The harvest ripen which my heart hath sown,
Nor in love's bliss forget love's agony.
I can but love thee, Dearest! All but this
Hath Fate forbidden. I may never hold
Thy breast to mine, with oft-imprinted kiss
Telling thee still what still remains untold.
I can but love thee. Shall I ask for more?
What if all other outlets be denied?
Through this one channel will my passion pour
The breadth and depth and fervour of its tide,
Freed by the bonds which it is doomed to wear,
Fed by the frozen fount of its despair.

IX

SOME seek possession of a winsome face,
A slender waist, a white voluptuous arm,
Some of a lissom figure's gliding grace,
Some of a voice that haunts with subtle charm.
All these are thine; yet not for these I prize
Thee, my Beloved! whose soul of dazzling light
Burns through thy body's beautiful disguise,
Veiled by its brightness from my baffled sight.
Some are condemned to gain what they have sought,—
A face, an arm, a voice, a slender waist;—
Till Time, the disenchanter, brings to nought
Their prized possession and their love misplaced.
But I, who seek what I may ne'er possess,
Find in love's failure proof of love's success.

X

OMETIMES vain longings to drink deep of love,
Like summer tempests, in my heart arise,
Till tremblingly my lips begin to move,
As love's avowal on their threshold dies.
Then like a puzzled child, with mute appeal
Scanning thy face, I ask it to confess
Thy heart's deep secret, but its eyes reveal
Nought but their own enchanting loveliness.
And then I think—O love, forgive the thought—
That thou art passionless as earth or sky,
Absorbing all my life but giving nought,
No pitying tear, no self-reproachful sigh;—
Clasped by a love which thou canst ne'er requite,—
Cold to its flame but radiant in its light.

XI

I WOULD that for a season I might merge
My life in thine and be whate'er thou art,
And feel thy restless passion roll and surge,
And read the secret of thine inmost heart:—
I would that, gazing through thy glorious eyes,
My soul might see things as they seem to thee,
See with thy soul the wonder of the skies,
Hear with thy heart the message of the sea:—
Nay, I would be myself a wave, a star,
A flower that scents the air, a bird that sings,
That thou whose brooding love, from near and far,
Draws to thy soul the soul of outward things,—
That thou mightst love me, for no worth of mine,
And draw my life into the depths of thine.

XII

COULDST thou but guess with what a burning thirst
I who am cold as midnight, calm as death,
I who can smile when Fate has done his worst,
I who can make despair my being's breath,—
Couldst thou but guess with what a poignant pain
I long to hear what I have never heard,—
Long, with a hope which knows that hope is vain,
To hear thee speak one soft endearing word ;—
Oh, then, since pity is the nurse of love,
I think thy gentle heart would come to mine,
And nestling near it like a murmuring dove,
Whisper "I love thee: take me: I am thine."
Fond dream, avaunt! My thirst for love must burn,
For love's own sake, unquenched by love's return.

XIII

SOME happy lovers are afire with hope,
With dreams of rapture, visions of delight:
Their cloudless azure knows no westward slope,
Their day no dark foreboding of the night.
Some hapless lovers, when their dreams are o'er,
When hope expires o'er-surfeited with bliss,
Think that the day of love will dawn no more,
And sound the lowest depth of night's abyss.
But I who dream not of what may not be,
Who turn from hope as others turn from shame,
Find in despair a deeper ecstasy,
And burn with frost as others burn with flame.
For love, when stabbed by Fate's relentless knife,
Draws from each death-wound a new fount of life.

XIV

YES; I could burn with all the fire of youth:
Yes; I could glow with passion's fiercest flame:
Yes; I could love thee till love's naked truth
Had told its tale and put all words to shame.
What spell hath bound me then that I am cold
With heat's intensity? By what new stress
Of wayward passion is my fire controlled?
Or does it die, quenched by its own excess?
No: 'tis my love of love that holds at bay
The rebel flames that burn in love's own guise,—
My love of love, my fear of love's decay,
My fear of dying love's reproachful eyes;—
My haunting fear lest aught of earth should mar
The glorious dawn of love's unrisen star.

XV

HADST thou been mine, my bride, my very own;
Had my fond heart been free to work its will,
To love thee only, live for thee alone,
Exhaust its fount of love, yet love thee still;—
Had it been mine to kiss thy lips, to toy
With the coiled tresses of thy burnished hair,
To compass thee with pride and hope and joy,
Shielding thy life from every doubt and care;—
And had thy heart, sick with satiety
Of such a love, at last begun to pine
For change, for coldness, for inconstancy,
For aught but this too lavish love of mine,—
I wonder would thy love's last dying breath
Have touched my passion with the frost of death.

XVI

SHALL I thank God that I may never kneel,
In love's impatient ardour, at thy feet?
Shall I thank God that I may never feel
Thy beating bosom slowly cease to beat?
What if a voice had whispered, " Time flies fast:
Kiss her dark eyes: uncoil each golden tress:
But know that she will turn from thee at last,
And spurn thee for thy very love's excess."
Should I have shrunk, benumbed with chilling fears,
Shrunk from my doom, shrunk from thy warm embrace?
Oh never so! Nought in the coming years
Had I foreseen but thy bewitching face;
Nought but thine eyes piercing with shafts of light
The hidden future's rolling clouds of night.

XVII

YET is it well that thou art still a dream,
A dear desire, a message from afar,
A name that haunts my thought, a wayward gleam
Of tremulous light, a ray from some lone star;—
And well it is that I may never guess
Thy heart's profoundest secret, never know
What hidden flame inspires thy loveliness,
What tides of passion bear thee to and fro:—
And well that in the temple of my heart
Despair hath built a shrine where, night and day,
Love's votive lamp reveals thee as thou art,
And scares profaning hopes and prayers away!
For love that lives in love's delight must die,
But love's despair is love's eternity.

XVIII

SOMETIMES capricious Love, to prove his might,
Forsakes his throne and plays a traitor's part,
Quenching the quintessential flames that light
With starlike dreams the darkness of my heart.
Then for a while, heart-whole by love's decree,
I strive no more to loose Fate's master-knot;
And, though my love is more than life to me,
Love and the loved one are alike forgot.
But, with the waning of love's sacred fire,
My dreams depart; the world resumes its sway;
And each high purpose and each large desire
Fades like a phantom in the light of day:
And then I know that slowly, breath by breath,
My soul is sinking into deeps of death.

XIX

FROWN on me when thou wilt: I little care
What angry clouds may overcast the sky:
Strong in the pride and courage of despair,
I'll face love's lightnings with unflinching eye.
Frown on me when thou wilt: my heart knows well
That, howsoe'er the storm-clouds throng and roll,
Behind them all, purer than words can tell,
Burns the unsullied azure of thy soul.
O sunlit sky, thy clouds will part and pass,
And from their fringes mystically bright,
Turning to gems the tear-drops on the grass,
Will burst a flood of world-transfiguring light;
For lovelier far the frowns that mar thy grace,
Than all the sunshine of another's face.

XX

I LOVE thee less that I may love thee more:
The refluent wave rolls in with larger sweep,
And surging up the half-abandoned shore
Wins a new margin for love's restless deep.
I love thee less that love may rest his wing
In drooping circles ere he soar anew,
Ere he ascend in spiral airy ring,
To pass from sight into the pathless blue.
I love thee less that love may be re-born,
That I may feel the breeze blow fresh and cold,
May breathe once more the fragrance of the morn,
May see once more the streaks of green and gold:—
I love thee less that out of love's dark night
May break the dawn of a diviner light.

XXI

MY Belovèd, had I loved thee less
I might have asked for more,—I might have prayed
To feast my senses on thy loveliness,
To wreathe my brow with flowers that bloom and fade.
I might have dreamed of warm encircling arms,
Of kisses telling what words dare not say,
Of love enmeshed in beauty's fatal charms,
Of love whose torrent sweeps its banks away.
But ever as I saw the sacred fire,
Flashed from afar, irradiate thine eyes,
Taught by its very passion to aspire,
My love grew worthy of its glorious prize;—
Until at last, transfigured by its aim,
It quenched with light its own devouring flame.

XXII

O FLAMES of passion, will ye never die,
That trampled into dust anon revive,
And wrap my heart in fire and stream on high?—
O rebel flames, die down and ye shall live.
Ay, ye shall burn more bravely than of old,
Fed by the fuel of love's self-control,—
Burn till your fiercer heat seems pale and cold,
Burn in the furnace of love's inmost soul.
Ay, ye shall burn, when love has quenched your fire,
Burn on for aye, triumphant in your death;
For, as your tempest-driven waves expire,
They wake again, lit by love's purer breath;—
Wake to new life, though lost to mortal sight,
In love's white flame, in love's transcendent light.

XXIII

I HAVE a longing for a larger life:
A haunting sense of restlessness is mine:
I long to wage some world-convulsing strife;
To weave the tissue of some vast design:—
I long to do some strong heroic deed;
To right with flashing sword some cruel wrong;
To give to men some soul-redeeming creed;
To blow some mighty trumpet-blast of song.
Hence, vain desires! Or are ye wholly vain?
Let others write their names on History's page:
Grace be to love! mine is a higher plane,
A wider battle-ground, a grander stage;—
For when with Fate I wrestle for love's sake,
God's kingdom—lost or ransomed—is my stake.

XXIV

WHY art thou silent? Since the breezes bore
Thy voice away, summer hath come and fled.
Why art thou silent? Speak, oh speak once more:—
Am I forgotten? Is our friendship dead?
Dead—let it die; let all its tendril cords
Shrivel to smoke in love's devouring flame.
Break not thy silence. What are friendship's words?
Poor faltering notes which silence puts to shame.
Let friendship die. When thou and I are friends,
Whate'er I give flows back to me again,
Choking love's outlet: but when friendship ends,
Love's fount released comes flooding forth amain.
Oh then forget me that my love may grow
The stronger for its ruin and its woe.

XXV

HAST thou too suffered? Does thy silence hide
An unprobed wound, a secret none may share?
Hast thou too dreamed that love was by thy side,
Then waked to find thy lover was Despair?
Hast thou too stretched over this gulf of doom
Vain hands of yearning for what ne'er shall be?
Has thy life felt the shadow of my gloom?
Has thy heart ached with my heart's agony?
O love, I dare not ask, I dare not guess
What message flashes from thy soul to mine.
Strong in thy silence and my loneliness,
I guard the banner that is love's and thine.
Yet but to dream that thou hast suffered so
Pierces my heart with love's most poignant throe.

XXVI

DEAR comrades hast thou when thy life is lone,—
Dear friends for comfort when thy heart is sad:—
The murmuring dove will make thy plaint her own;
The soaring lark will sing to make thee glad;
Soft on thy soul will fall the dews of night;
Radiant with hope will dawn for thee the day;
The sunset-glow will flood thy soul with light;
The wild sea-breeze will blow thy tears away.
These will befriend thee; but he loves thee best,
The hapless friend whose yearning love is vain;
Who, though he feels thy heart-throbs in his breast,
May never staunch thy wounds nor soothe their pain;
Nor hush with fond embraces thy sad sighs;
Nor dry with kisses thy tear-haunted eyes.

XXVII

HE more I love thee, my Beloved! the more
I long to love thee without stint or stay,—
To love and still to love,—to pour and pour
Fresh floods of love in pulsing waves away.
This is my wish, my prayer. I ask for nought
But just to love. No dream of love's return
Troubles my happiness; no sordid thought
Of what love spends, of what love hopes to earn.
Oh do not love me. Sorrow, loss and pain,
Despair and ruin, for my love's dear sake,
I could endure: but to be loved again—
I dare not think of it; my heart would break.
Oh do not love me: spare me: leave me free
To dream of one thing only—love of thee.

XXVIII

IF love thou must; if love is life's own flame;
If passion kindles passion:—Oh forbear
To flood with love the fountain whence love came,
To melt with love the ice-fall of despair.
Scarce can love's channel hold its brimming stream;
One whispered word might sweep its walls away:
Oh let my hope remain a hopeless dream,
A dumb desire, a prayer I dare not pray.
If love thou must, if love to love is drawn
As star to star,—then love this voiceless woe,
This hidden fire, this darkness of the dawn,
These unbreathed sighs, these tears that will not flow:—
Love the vast love that makes my life its own,
But love it, Dearest! for itself alone.

XXIX

LOVE, forgive me. I am weak of heart:
I fear love's last extremity of pain:
Steadfast of soul to play the lover's part,
I shun the burden of being loved again.
Love me, if love thou must. The ebb is o'er;
The wind awakes; the sands are wet and wide.
Love me, if love thou must. I'll fear no more
To meet the rush of love's returning tide.
Love me, if love thou must. I proudly claim
The right to suffer what I dared to shun;
The right to dream that love's contagious flame
Has leaped from heart to heart and made us one;
The right to guess what words will never say;
The right to kiss in dreams thy tears away.

XXX

I DREAMED, Belovèd, that I heard thy voice
Saying "Thy love shall have its due reward:
Take what thy heart desires: be thine the choice:
No gulf divides us now, no flaming sword."
Then didst thou proffer me love's cup of bliss,
With gracious words that haunt my memory still,—
"O love, for love's dear sake I bring thee this:
Drink, if thou must; thy love shall have its will."
But as I heard thy voice and felt thy touch,
Love's purest wave surged upward to its flood,
Matching the love that made thee give so much,
Quenching with joy the fever in my blood:—
"O love," I cried, "no wine of earth can slake
The thirst for thee which thy fond words awake."

XXXI

LIFE is too brief for love, too brief for aught
But silence and despair: methought life's clue
Was in love's keeping; but the years have taught
My humbled heart that love makes all things new.
I have no time to dream, to hope, to burn,
To count the gains, the hazards of love's play:
I dare not wait—there is so much to learn—
To chase the butterflies that haunt love's way.
Life is too brief for love: the days depart;
And I, love's adept, am a tiro still.
O Love, with frost of death benumb my heart
That I may learn thy meaning and thy will.
Vain prayer! for life and death are less to thee
Than waves, O Love, in thy world-circling sea.

XXXII

LOVE! I lie alone upon thy shore,
And, like a child, gather with eager hands
The shells and seaweeds, which, when storms are o'er,
Thine ebbing tide leaves on the shining sands.
Then, gazing seaward with entrancèd eyes,
I watch the ceaseless changes of thy breast,
Which now reflects the azure of the skies,
Now, scourged by passion, rolls in wild unrest.
Which is thy self—the stillness or the storm ?
The brooding darkness or the sparkling light?
Or is thy fickle ever-changing form
The mocking mask that hides thee from our sight;—
Hides what thou art, hides what we ne'er shall know,—
Thy vast unfathomable life below?

XXXIII

LOVE! when thine eyes are dim with unwept tears,
When speechless sorrow trembles in thy voice,
What can I do to charm away thy fears,
To bid thy heart look upward and rejoice?
What can I give thee to assuage thy woe?
My life? A dream! My joy? A dream's delight!
My steadfast faith, my buoyant hope? Ah no!
When thou art sad my faith and hope take flight.
All these are nought. One gift and one alone
Is worth the giving. O my dear! my dove!
If that will soothe thee, take it,—'tis thine own—
Tear from my heart the passion of its love.
So well I love thee that my love could make
My heart forget to love thee, for love's sake.

XXXIV

AKE me, O Sea, and clasp me to thy breast;
Bury me deep beneath thy surf and foam.
Far have I fared: Oh let my soul find rest;
Homesick and weary, let me wander home.
Take me, O Sea of Love:—long, long ago,
Athirst for life I rose from thy embrace,
Rose on the winds and drifted to and fro,
An aimless pilgrim of the voids of space;—
Till, summoned from afar, through cloud and rain
And rushing rivulet and gliding stream
Homeward I sped:—Oh make me thine again,
Clasp me, O Sea, till life becomes a dream:—
Drown me, O Sea, in thy unfathomed soul,
Deeper than tides can swing or billows roll.

XXXV

BAFFLED, rebuffed, borne backward by the tide
Of adverse fortune, scourged by wind and wave,
Driven like wreckage o'er the waters wide,
Helpless, forlorn, with none to cheer or save;—
One hope sustains me, to one faith I cling,—
That what I suffer love will count as gain;
That from my failure love at last will spring,
Renewed, inspired, transfigured by my pain;—
That love will find an Eden of delight
In my poor heart's Gethsemane of woe,—
Find a new dawn in my despair's dark night,
Peace in each whirlwind, healing in each throe;—
Cleansed by my passion's purgatorial flame,
And raised to glory on my cross of shame.

XXXVI

FOR thy dear sake these wounds must ever bleed,
Must ever throb, must ever wring my soul;
For so alone will love at last be freed
From the dark prison-house of Fate's control.
Were Time to change each wound into a scar,
To staunch its bleeding and allay its pain,
Then had I waged an unavailing war,
And suffered fruitless pangs and bled in vain.
Take hence thy bandages O Time! take hence
Thy cruel anodynes. I breathe no prayer
But this, to feel with ever quickened sense
The anguish of an ever new despair.
For anguish is the pulse of passion's breast;
And love lies pillowed on the soul's unrest.

XXXVII

ONE deep sacred outlet of my soul!
O aching wound through which my life-blood flows!
Were it not well that Time should make thee whole,
And soothe with numbing touch thy poignant throes?
Ah no! for in Time's triumph love would die,
And love is more than life. O wounded heart,
Bleed on, exultant in love's agony,
Bleed on, defiant of Time's healing art.
Dear wound, bleed on; and ever, as the tide
Of inward life wells up and gushes through,
Into the hollows of my heart will glide,
From deep mysterious fountains lost to view,
Drawn by the pulsing outrush of my blood,
Love's life-renewing life-transforming flood.

XXXVIII

OVE! do I love thee less because in vain
My heart desires what other hearts love best?
Because, triumphant in its very pain,
My heart desires what heart hath ne'er possessed?
Love! do I love thee less because thy face
Glows with a beauty beyond mortal sight?
Because thy soul flits from my soul's embrace
And lures it on into new lands of light?
Love! do I love thee less because I dream
That I shall love thee more and ever more?
Because I see, beyond love's morning gleam,
A purer day than ever dawned before?
Oh no! Despair and failure, pain and strife
Are not love's ashes but its flame of life.

XXXIX

WHEN thou art near me; when I hear thy voice;
When thy dear eyes pour sunlight into mine;
My soul is far too happy to rejoice,
My heart too deeply stricken to repine.
Swifter than thought I pass from bliss to woe;—
Swifter than thought from blessedness to doom;
Each gleam of hope leaves as its after-glow
A deeper depth of more than midnight gloom.
For in the mystic dream-world of our souls
We kiss and clasp and mingle and are one:
But every wave of joy that earthward rolls
From that bright shore beyond our setting sun,
Baffled by Fate's reef-ramparts bleak and bare,
Breaks into foam and ruin and despair.

XL

WHAT is despair? Perhaps a larger hope,
Which looks beyond the range of mortal eyes,
And strives, impatient of earth's narrow scope,
To wrest from failure what success denies.
What is despair? Perhaps a deeper joy,
Deeper than heart desires—a golden morn,
The pale approaches of whose light destroy
Life's wonted joys, and leave our hearts forlorn.
What is despair? Perhaps a purer love,
Purer than earth can kindle or sustain,—
A love that soars into the realms above,
And soaring seeks what it may never gain.
Oh more than hope, oh more than joy to me,
Oh more than love is my despair of thee.

XLI

WHEN comes the hour of parting; when thy face
Fades into darkness; when I strive to call
Its vanished features out of empty space,
But in a mist of beauty lose them all;
Then for a while the sunset of thy charm
Dies into deep, impenetrable night;
And I am haunted by a wild alarm
Lest love should ne'er unveil its hidden light.
But darkness lifts the blinding veil of day;
And, gazing upward with new-opened eyes,
I see, immeasurably far away,
Above the zenith of the midnight skies,
Thee, round whose orb all stars like planets move,—
Thee, throned and crowned, the queen of light and love.

XLII

WHAT consolation or what recompense
Awaits the heart whose passion is its doom ?
What possible delight of soul or sense
Could make atonement for its pain and gloom ?
Ah ! when the heart is stretched upon love's cross,
It asks for nothing ; for it knows too well
That all the treasures of the earth are dross,
That, when love's light is darkness, Heaven is Hell.
O lonely heart, love on, nor count the cost,—
Love on, without a hope, without a sign :
Though all life's prizes, all life's joys be lost,
If love remains, the whole, wide world is thine ;—
For love re-lights in sorrow's last abyss
The lamp that floods the whole wide world with bliss.

XLIII

THINK not of me as one whose heaven is hell,
For I am happy in my heart's distress,—
Happy beyond what love's own words can tell,
Happy beyond what happier hearts can guess.
As, when at eventide a storm enshrouds
With blackness of despair the sunset light,
The fringes of the dark disastrous clouds
Burn with a brightness which is more than bright;—
So when love's orb, by envious Fate oppressed,
Sinks into twilight gloom, its hidden flame
Breaks through the dungeon darkness of the west,
And turns the symbols of its grief and shame
To robes of glory, lovelier in love's eyes
Than the full splendour of unclouded skies.

XLIV

INTO the hidden subsoil of my heart,
Downward and outward from the soil above,
With stealthy rootlets searching every part
For food and life, descend the roots of love;—
Searching for love's fruition and delight:—
But though the thirsty rootlets wander wide,
Feeling their way with blind, unerring sight,
Their quest is vain, their prize is still denied.
Faint not, O love, though hard thy soil and dry;—
Faint not, nor droop: thy quest shall have no end:
Deeper and deeper still life's waters lie;
Deeper and deeper let thy roots descend;
Till, safely anchored in the soul at last,
Thy soaring stem shall break the wildest blast.

XLV

BECAUSE my soul was strong enough to yield
To the dear might of love's constraining grace;
Because I asked not what the years concealed,
But staked my life, my all on thy sweet face;
Because I bared my bosom to love's dart,
And bade its poison throb through every vein;
Because with desperate and dauntless heart
I drew fresh life from every stab of pain;—
Because I served Love thus and wrought his will,
He bade me name my recompense; and I,
Made bold by joy, cried out "O Love! fulfil
This prayer that, purified by agony,
Schooled by despair, my heart may worthier grow
To wear thy wound-imprinting crown of woe."

XLVI

FORLORN of hope, shall I make Death my friend
And beg a draught of his benumbing wine,
That as its slumber-breathing fumes ascend,
I may forget that love was ever mine?
Shall I chide Death that he delays to come,
Delays to heal the death-wound of my soul?—
Nay, but he heard me, though my prayer was dumb,
And came in love's disguise and made me whole:—
Long since he came, and with his hand of ice
Touched into nothingness love's mortal part,
Leaving behind, when I had paid his price,
The love that crowns with life the lover's heart.
O kindly Death, since thou hast claimed thine own,
I live by love, I live for love alone.

XLVII

ART thou the happier for my hopeless love?
Art thou the happier for its dumb despair?
Oh if thou art, despair will soar above
Hope's highest flight into love's azure air.
Art thou the happier for this hopeless quest,
This baffled dream, this unavailing strife?
Oh if thou art, my love will surely wrest
From failure victory, from death new life.
Art thou the happier for these wounds that hide
Even from my heart their pangs of mortal woe?
Oh if thou art, a fount of joy and pride
From every bleeding wound will ever flow.
Dear love! if thou art happier for my pain,
My stricken heart will not have ached in vain.

XLVIII

LIKE as the thrush in winter, when the skies
Are drear and dark and all the woods are bare,
Sings undismayed, till from his melodies
Odours of spring float through the frozen air;—
So in my heart, when sorrow's icy breath
Is bleak and bitter and its frost is strong,
Leaps up, defiant of despair and death,
A sunlit fountain of triumphant song.
Sing on, sweet singer, till the violets come
And south winds blow; sing on, prophetic bird!
Oh if my lips, which are for ever dumb,
Could sing to men what my sad heart has heard,—
Life's darkest hour with songs of joy would ring;
Life's blackest frost would blossom into spring.

XLIX

HAT does my heart desire? I cannot tell:
What does my heart desire? I dare not guess:
For wild and lawless are the waves that swell
When love is storm-swept by its own excess.
Let wind by wave be answered. Far beneath,
My heart's desire obeys love's deeper will.
The breast of Ocean stirs to every breath:
Fathom its depths, and all is pure and still.
What does my heart desire? O love! I think
That, though the restless billows roll above,
Deeper than plummet-line of thought can sink,
Desire at last is lost in depths of love,—
Of love as pure, as peaceful and as free
As the unplumbed abysses of the sea.

L

BRIMMING goblet of forbidden bliss,
Kindling a thirst which I may never slake;
O fatal beauty that I clasp and kiss
Only in dreams from which 'tis woe to wake:—
Is it in vain that I have schooled my will
To bow submissively to Fate's decrees,
To leave the wine of love untasted still
While, drop by drop, Time drains it to the lees?
Ah no, Beloved:—when life begins to wane,
Thy soul that gave thee every grace and charm,
Will draw its treasures to itself again,
And guard them in its bosom safe from harm,—
Safe, till my soul, lost in thy soul's embrace,
Shall drink at last thine every charm and grace.

LI

"EVEN to the edge of doom love bears it out,"
So sang of old love's poet. Ay—and then?—
Will love recoil, trembling with fear and doubt,
From any doom that waits for mortal men?
"Even to the edge of doom"—the poet sings.
So far—no further? Will the depths of doom
Engulf poor love, or will his seraph wings
Span that abyss of life-encircling gloom?
"Even to the edge of doom"—and thence away
Beyond all limits love will sing and soar,
Till far beneath his feet he sees the day
Dawn o'er the world and dawn for evermore,—
And learns at last that doom's abyss of night
Is but the shadow flung from God's own light.

LII

BECAUSE I love thee, Dearest! I could pray
That thou mightst know the bliss that I have known;—
The joy, the triumph of being swept away
By love's great current—helpless, lost and lone; —
That thou mightst learn how love can wing his flight,
Beyond the dreamland of the heart's desire,
To worlds vibrating with ethereal light,
Where earthborn flames burn as celestial fire.
That thou mightst follow, without hope or fear,
Some angel soul as I have followed thine,
Till the last thought of self should disappear,
And in the stillness of life's inmost shrine
Thy soul, new shriven by the loved one's grace,
Should see the splendour of Love's cloudless face.

LIII

F old came Fate, imperious and proud,
And said "Abase thyself and kneel to me;
I wield God's thunderbolts." With head unbowed
I answered "No! my inmost life is free."
Then Fate in anger stretched me on a cross
Of piercing anguish and tormenting care;
And sent me disappointment, trouble, loss,
Perplexity, bewilderment, despair:—
But all in vain! My soul, unyielding still,
Found refuge in itself from pain and woe;
And ever, with unconquerable will,
When Fate demanded homage, answered "No";
Till in his wrath he summoned thee to prove
My rebel heart with flame of hopeless love.

LIV

FATE little knows—blind ruler of the blind,
Whose kingdom is the course of outward things—
That in the boundless empire of the mind
His plaything, Love, sits throned as King of Kings.
Fate little guessed, when with empoisoned steel
Of love's despair he stabbed my stricken breast,
How one immedicable wound would heal
All other wounds or lull their pangs to rest.
Fate little dreamed, when, summoned from afar,
Thy beauty came to blight and to destroy,
That Love would lead me like a guiding star,
Into the land of inward peace and joy,—
A land of light, where no dark shadows fall,
Where Fate is nothing and where Love is all.

LV

OMETIMES, when musing on thine absent face,
I seem to see thy soul dilate, expand,
Till, ether-like, it fills the realms of space,
Diffused through earth and sky, through sea and land:—
Or, like a life that melts into the Past,
I see thy spirit mingle with the soul
Of universal Nature, freed at last
From bonds of self, one with the living Whole.
Then, when thine eyes kindle the flame of dawn,
Or when thy voice is echoed by the sea,
Through all the pores of sense thy soul is drawn
Deep into mine, till I am one with thee;—
Lost in thy life, lost in my love's abyss,—
My days a dream, my life a throb of bliss.

LVI

AS one who, wandering in a pathless dream,
Scans his own doings with another's eye,
So, when I muse upon my past, I deem
'Tis mine no more, and doubt if I am I.
Love! was it I who through those weary years
Waited unwearied till love's morning broke?
Love! was it I who heard with ravished ears
Love's voice in thine, and at his call awoke?
What is my self? A river gliding past,
With ever-widening flood, from source to sea.
O sea to which all rivers glide at last,
I am not I till I am lost in thee;—
I am not I till, freed from self's control,
I cease to be, and love absorbs my soul.

LVII

THINK the world will ne'er be wide enough
For the free flight of love's aspiring wings;
I think that heaven and earth are but the stuff
Whence love doth weave his dreams of lovelier things;
I think that shining star and burning sun
Are motes that wander in love's stream of light;
That all would perish, if love's goal were won,
Their fire extinct, in pathless gulfs of night.
O my lost love! O beauty past desire!
O prize that heart may never hope to gain!
Is it not well that still, from fire to fire,
From deep to deep, love seeks thee,—but in vain?
Is it not well that love should woo thee so,
And through life's failure keep life's torch aglow?

LVIII

MAYA! Illusion! Is it all a dream?
Will thy dear eyes beguile me till I wake,
Then fade away, and in their parting gleam
Tell me I loved thee for Another's sake?
Art thou the veil, the mask that hides from thought
The deeper beauty of a larger soul,—
Large as the world is wide? Has passion wrought
Such sweet oblivion of love's only goal?
Dear love of mine, I laugh my fear to scorn:—
Whate'er thy presence veils grows one with thee:
Thine is the beauty that is still unborn:
Thine is the face that love at last shall see:—
For Nature's soul, that pulses in thy heart,
Mingling with thee becomes the soul thou art.

LIX

THERE is a well at life's extremest verge,—
A bitter well in which all sorrows blend:
Below, love's ocean rolls its restless surge;
Above, the ramparts of the world ascend.
Thence glide the waves, unseen by mortal eyes,
The rhythmic waves, unheard by mortal ears,
Whose flashes make the splendour of the skies,
Whose murmurs make the music of the spheres.
And whoso climbs to where that fountain springs,
And drinks a deep draught of its bitter brine,
Shall lose thenceforth all care of earthly things,
And burn for ever with a thirst divine,—
A quenchless thirst, a passionate desire,
A soul-consuming, soul-expanding fire.

LX

H for a draught from that mysterious well,
Oh for a deep draught of its bitter stream,
That I might loose me from earth's numbing spell.
Like one who wakes bewildered from a dream.
Oft had I breathed this prayer; but still on high
The hidden pathway climbed beyond my thought
Through fear and gloom; and none who passed me by
Could give me guidance to the goal I sought;—
Till, led by thee, I gained the sacred springs;
For thy pure heart alone could guess the way:
And now, forgetful of all earthly things,
I wait the dawn of God's eternal day;
And see the world's last ramparts rise above,
And hear below the surging sea of love.

LXI

NO more, Belovèd, must we meet no more?
No more make fond exchange of word and thought?
Has love made shipwreck on despair's bleak shore?
Is life a failure? Are the dead years nought?
Nought—O my queen? Nay, there's no cloud so black
But it will break at last and fade away;
And I shall yet summon the dead years back,
And weave them all into one timeless day.
For love will guide me through the night of death,
Into the land where love-worn souls find rest,
Dreaming at will, while life renews its breath,—
Dreaming the dream of love that each loves best:—
There at my will the Past shall live again,
And reap as rapture what it sowed as pain.

LXII

" HE poet in the grave of poesy
Buries his heart's dead passion:"—so men prate
Who never loved nor sang; but not for me
Hath love prepared so dark and dire a fate.
Love taught my silent heart to sing again:
Love hushed its doubts: love charmed its fears away:
And ever, as it echoed love's refrain,
The passion deepened that inspired its lay.
And if at last my heart shall cease to sing,
Will love have sung himself to sleep? Ah no!
But up and ever up with tireless wing,
Lost in the splendour of the noontide glow,
My soaring love will flood with melodies,
Too pure for mortal ear, God's golden skies.

LXIII

WHEN, in the solemn stillness of the night,
My musing soul is filled with love of thee,
I seem to stand upon the world's last height,
The flaming rampart of all things that be.
And as I pause upon that lonely verge,
And plunge my gaze into the gulf below,
I see the cosmic billows sweep and surge
From death to life, with endless ebb and flow.
But howsoever deep my thought may sink
Into that well of darkness and of fire,
And howsoever deep my soul may drink
Of light and life and wonder and desire,—
Love still remains,—the love that thou hast waked—
Its deeps unfathomed and its thirst unslaked.

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